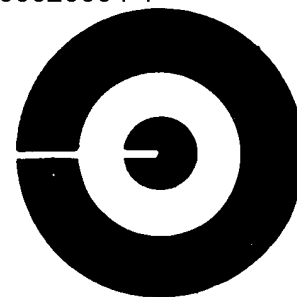


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REPORT REFURRI



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SOUR REACTION TO GOOD NEWS

When the Air Force released a study on February 24 showing that the herbicide, Agent Orange, had not wrecked the health of the Vietnam veterans who had experienced the greatest exposure to it, Big Media were not eager to trumpet that good news throughout the land. Indeed, depending on what newspaper you read or what television program you watched, you might have come away with the impression that the comprehensive investigation of the health of the veterans of Operation Ranch Hand, the men who sprayed Agent Orange in Vietnam during the 1962-71 period, had indicted rather than exonerated the defoliant.

The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather said: "The Air Force reported the results today of what's called the most exhaustive study yet of Vietnam veterans exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange. Among the findings: higher skin cancer rates and other problems detected in the vets and their children. However, on the whole, the Air Force says, the results are reassuring." Those who recall the heavy-handed way in which Dan Rather emphasized that film footage of military action in Grenada had been provided by the Department of Defense and censored by them, would not be surprised to find that CBS News didn't share the Air Force view.

Instead of telling the reasons why the Air Force found the findings reassuring, CBS immediately turned to the case of a Vietnam veteran who had recently died of cancer at age 36. It showed his family and friends expressing the view that his cancer had been caused by Agent Orange. CBS News did not report that the Air Force study had found no evidence of any link between malignancies and Agent Orange exposure. Instead it sought to perpetuate the notion that there is such a link by airing opinions lacking any scientific foundation. This is not too surprising, since it was WBBM-TV, the CBS-owned-and-operated television station in Chicago, that began the scare stories about the health effects of Agent Orange back in 1978. Bill Kurtis, who is now co-host of the CBS Morning News, put on a documentary about Vietnam veterans who thought that the cancers and other serious ailments afflicting them had been caused by exposure to Agent Orange. The program won an "Emmy" award, but like so many award-winning programs, it was irresponsible and totally lacking any scientific basis.

The CBS News report on the Air Force study on the health of the Ranch Handers did not give a single one of the positive findings of the study. The most important of these were that among the 1,045 veterans of Operation Ranch Hand who had been given intensive physical examinations there was not a single case of three ailments that are either known or suspected of being linked to dioxin poisoning. Dioxin is the toxin which is supposed to have caused all those ailments. It is a contaminant which was found in Agent Orange in minute quantities. The only ailment that it is known to cause in man for certain is a skin rash called chloracne. None of the Ranch Handers had any medical history of having suffered from chloracne, and biopsies indicated that none had. Nor was a single soft-tissue sarcoma found in this group. A Swedish study had suggested that exposure to dioxin might result in an increase in this rare form of cancer. Nor were there any cases of the rare liver ailment, porphyria cutanea tarda, which may also be linked to dioxin poisoning.

ABC Takes the Same Tack

ABC News treated the story much as CBS did. Peter Jennings, the anchorman, started off saying that the study indicated that Agent Orange didn't appear to be responsible "for abnormally high rates of disease" among the veterans studied (implying that they had abnormally high rates, which was not true). He then introduced correspondent Rick Inderfurth to report that the findings would not convince everyone. Inderfurth brought on a veteran who blamed Agent Orange for the illness he was suffering. Saying that the Air Force study "tried to dismiss those concerns," he showed Maj. Gen. Murphy Chesney saying the study showed the Ranch Handers to be healthier than those who didn't go to Vietnam. Inderfurth countered: "But other Air Force officials are far more cautious and interpret the study's findings differently. They see some disturbing signs of early illness among those exposed to the herbicide, including skin cancer, liver disorders and possible birth defects. To make that point he showed an Air Force biostatistician who had appeared at the press conference at which the report was released and had indicated that "a degree of concern is warranted" with respect to the minor differences noted between the

Ranch Handers and the control group. He wanted to see further work done, which is what the Air Force plans to do.

Inderfurth next brought on a Congressman who is convinced that Agent Orange is the cause of serious ailments, Rep. Thomas Daschle of South Dakota. Daschle could see nothing reassuring in the report, and Inderfurth wound up saying that it may be a long time "before the adverse health effects of Agent Orange and dioxin are known" and that veterans will just have to hope that the reassuring Air Force report proves correct.

More Negativism from NBC

NBC's anchor, Tom Brokaw, the man who has said that he thinks it is his job to explain why the State Department's views on El Salvador are wrong, struck an ominous note. He said: "Agent Orange is a defoliant, a chemical used to burn away the jungle. Many American veterans who were exposed to it claim it is burning away their lives as well." He said the Air Force study might be reassuring to the Ranch Handers, but would not satisfy others, according to correspondent Jack Reynolds. Reynolds then told how thousands were contending the Agent Orange had inflicted serious diseases upon them. He said: "In Operation Ranch Hand the United States sprayed 12 million tons of the defoliant, which contains highly toxic dioxin, to burn away Vietcong jungle hideaways." There are two errors and one exaggeration in that single sentence. The amount of Agent Orange sprayed was 19 million gallons, weighing about 75,000 tons. Agent Orange didn't burn away the jungle; it caused the leaves to drop off, but they grew back again, requiring repeat spraying. Agent Orange did contain minute quantities of dioxin, but it was present as an ineradicable contaminant in quantities that the Ranch Hand study indicates were not toxic to those who were most heavily exposed to it.

Rather than talking about a veteran dying from cancer, NBC interviewed a Ranch Hand veteran who said that he was relieved by the findings but not surprised. He was in good health. Then NBC went to the veterans who think that their ill health is the fault of Agent Orange exposure—one who said he was "falling apart from the inside out" and one who is being operated on for the 23rd time "for problems his doctor can't identify." The latter said his main problem was lumps under his skin, an ailment that he indicated affected his daughter also.

Like CBS and ABC, NBC noted that the study "did acknowledge some medical problems—skin cancer, liver disorders, birth defects." Reynolds said the Air Force doctors "played down the seriousness of these results." He didn't bother to explain why. The study had made it clear that the Ranch Handers had a higher rate of skin cancer and reported more minor birth defects among their children than did the control group with which they were compared. Noting that the main cause of skin cancer among white males is exposure to sunlight, the report said that further study would have to be made to see if the Ranch Handers as a group had been more exposed to sunlight. The birth defects were mainly birth marks and skin blemishes. There were no differences for serious birth defects. There were no differences between the two groups in liver ailments at

the time of examination, but Ranch Handers had reported more symptoms of liver problems in the past. There was nothing in the study that disputed the conclusion voiced by the deputy surgeon general of the Air Force, Maj. Gen. Murphy Chesney, who said that the study had shown the Ranch Handers to be more healthy than the population that stayed at home and did not go to Vietnam.

Newspapers Almost as Bad

The coverage of the Ranch Hand report exposed the way in which the liberal bias of reporters and editors affects the coverage of even non-political stories. The headline in The Washington Inquirer read: "Agent Orange Exonerated," and the story emphasized that no cases of chloracne, soft-tissue sarcoma or porphyria cutanea tarda had been found in the Ranch Hand group and that in terms of serious ailments the health of the group compared favorably with that of the control group. That was the important and reassuring conclusion of the Air Force report.

Here are some headlines from other papers.

STUDY PANEL CAUTIOUS ON VIET SPRAYS

Washington Post

AGENT ORANGE LINKED TO DISORDERS

Baltimore Sun

DEFOLIANT STUDY SETS OFF DEBATE

New York Times

STUDY DOWNPLAYS AGENT ORANGE EFFECTS

Poughkeepsie Journal

The Washington Post's lead paragraph read: "The Air Force yesterday said a new study has found that fliers exposed to toxic herbicides in Vietnam, primarily Agent Orange, show higher rates of skin cancer, liver disorders and circulatory problems in the legs. But it stressed that there is no evidence the problems were caused by exposure to the herbicides and said the fliers are generally in good health." The story never mentioned the good news that no cases of chloracne, soft-tissue sarcoma or porphyria cutanea tarda were found among the Ranch Handers.

The Baltimore Sun, which attributed its story to wire services, led with this paragraph: "The government's most exhaustive study so far into the health of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange has found higher rates than normal of skin cancers, birth defects and liver disorders among them, but it tells the veterans and their families that they should not be worried." Again nothing was said about the absence of the three serious rare ailments among the Ranch Handers.

The Washington Post at least mentioned that the higher number of birth defects was limited to birthmarks and rashes; the Baltimore Sun did not disclose that. The Post also quoted an Air Force doctor who pointed out that the difference in the incidence of these minor ailments between the Ranch Hand and the control group might be explained by differences in the exposure to sunlight and differences in smoking and drinking habits. The Ranch Handers did tend to be heavier smokers than were members of the control group. The Baltimore Sun provided no information to indicate that there was no



NOTES FROM THE EDITOR'S CUFF

By Reed Irvine

AIM Report

March-B 1984

IN THIS ISSUE WE COVER TWO STORIES DEALING WITH SCIENTIFIC MATTERS THAT HAVE BEEN mishandled by the media. The effort to make Agent Orange into a villain goes back to the days when the communists mounted a propaganda campaign to pressure the U. S. into discontinuing its use as a defoliant in Vietnam. It was effective in denying cover to the Vietcong, and they wanted it stopped for that reason. Of course, that was not what they based their propaganda effort on. They said that we were destroying the hardwood forests of Vietnam, causing great economic loss, ruining cropland, and killing civilians or causing great physical damage to them by spraying Agent Orange. A million-dollar study made by the National Academy of Sciences was released in 1974, which demolished the charges of damage to forests and croplands. It was not possible to make careful studies of civilians under Vietcong control, but the report concluded that the available evidence did not support the charges of damage to the health of civilians.

THOSE FINDINGS WERE BADLY MISREPORTED, ESPECIALLY BY THE NEW YORK TIMES, WHICH RELIED on information about the report that was leaked in advance by a member of the panel who disagreed with the conclusions. AIM had a hard time getting The Times to correct that story, but we finally succeeded. In 1978, campaigns were undertaken to blame Agent Orange for a wide variety of ailments suffered by Vietnam veterans and their offspring and to get one of the components of Agent Orange, a herbicide called 2,4,5-T, banned for use in the United States. WBBM-TV took the lead in the former. ABC's "20/20" helped out with very bad programs on both Agent Orange and 2,4,5-T. The EPA was pressured into banning the use of 2,4,5-T in forests, where it is used to kill brush that chokes out young trees. Ron Arnold has a very interesting discussion of this in his excellent book, At the Eye of the Storm: James Watt and the Environmentalists. He provides evidence indicating that the campaign against 2,4,5-T was linked to people interested in protecting marijuana grown illegally on public forest land in the west. Dragging in Agent Orange could have been a way of buttressing the contention that 2,4,5-T was a dangerous chemical. Ron Arnold's book is available from AIM in hardback for \$11.95 postpaid. I recommend it.

I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT AIM HAS RECEIVED A GRANT OF \$50,000 FROM THE CARTHAGE Foundation. We are deeply grateful to the foundation and its chairman, Mr. Richard M. Scaife, for this generous grant. Mr. Scaife, who is the publisher of the Sacramento Union and the Greensburg (Penn.) Tribune-Review, has long been a strong supporter of AIM. He was recently appointed by President Reagan to the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy.

I ALSO WANT TO WELCOME TO THE AIM FAMILY 250 BUYERS OF NEW HOMES IN ARIZONA AND COLORADO who were given complimentary subscriptions to the AIM Report by Charles H. Keating, Jr., who heads Continental Homes of Phoenix and Medema Homes of Colorado. Mr. Keating, who is a member of AIM's National Advisory Board, is giving the AIM Report to everyone who buys a home from Continental and Medema this year. He expects to sell 5,000 homes, and we are looking forward to welcoming those 5,000 new members. A great idea!

THE RESPONSE TO OUR REQUEST FOR YOUR VOTE ON WHETHER OR NOT WE SHOULD DO A TV response to the PBS history of Vietnam has been encouraging. We have had a "vote" in favor that totals \$15,500. That is a little short of the \$200,000 that will be required to produce a 2-hour program, but it is mostly in small pledges, indicating strong popular support. A history similar to that aired by PBS was telecast in France, and it stirred outrage there. I don't think we should let this die. Let's push ahead.

AS WE GO TO PRESS, THE SEC HAS NOT YET ISSUED ANY SUBPOENAS TO CBS NEWS PERSONNEL in connection with the CBS program on NutraSweet. Since the SEC itself never says whether or not it is carrying out an investigation, we don't know what the status of this matter is. I recommend that you write to companies that advertised on CBS News the nights the attack on NutraSweet was aired. You can mention that one of the chief critics of NutraSweet who was interviewed by CBS has admitted speculating on a decline in the price of its maker's stock. We don't know whether or not any CBS personnel did so, however. CBS should be criticized for devoting about five minutes each night for three straight nights to an attack which was inaccurate and exaggerated. I wouldn't suggest that the advertisers refuse to advertise on CBS News programs, but I think they should make CBS aware of the fact that they don't like to be associated with disreputable journalism of this type. Because of the large number of advertisers, we have divided them into four groups. I suggest that if your last name begins with a letter from A to E you write to the advertisers in column 1; F to K those in column 2; L to Q those in column 3; and R to Z those in column 4. But feel free to write to any of them that are of particular interest to you.

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evidence of any causal connection between any of these ailments and exposure to Agent Orange. Worse yet, the Sun said that mortality studies showed a higher death rate for the Ranch Handlers. That is false. The Air Force mortality study released on July 1, 1983 showed that Ranch Handlers were not dying in increased numbers, at earlier ages, or by unexpected causes. That was reported by the Baltimore Sun at the time.

The Philadelphia Inquirer made the same error with respect to the death rate, and it added that "the report also showed significantly higher rates of testicular, genital, and urinary cancers, which are usually rare in young men." That too was false. The Philadelphia Inquirer also neglected to mention the minor nature of the birth defects and the doubt that the skin cancers, etc. were causally related to Agent Orange exposure. On the plus side, The Inquirer was one of the few papers we examined that mentioned the absence of chloracne and soft-tissue sarcoma. It said nothing about the rare liver ailment that was also gratifyingly absent from the Ranch Hand group.

The New York Times delayed publication of its report on the Agent Orange study by one day, helping its reporter to deal with this highly technical report more accurately. The Times was the only paper to mention that the Ranch Handlers were found to be free of chloracne, soft-tissue sarcoma and porphyria cutanea tarda, although the Philadelphia Inquirer and the New York Daily News mentioned two of them. The Washington Post caught up with this important part of the story five days later, running an excellent editorial which brought out the importance of the absence of

these ailments. However, the Times erred in describing Col. Alvin L. Young of the White House Office of Science and Technology as being critical of the Air Force study. Col. Young, an Army expert on the Agent Orange problem, had high praise for the study.

None of the papers we examined pointed out that there was no difference between the Ranch Hand group and the control group in terms of miscarriages, still births, induced abortions, prematurity, learning disability of the offspring, infant deaths or severe or moderate birth defects. However, three of the papers mentioned that there was a significantly higher rate of infant deaths among children fathered by Ranch Handlers during the first 28 days after birth, according to the parents. That anomaly is to be investigated further.

What stands out in the newspaper reporting of this story is the nearly universal emphasis on the minor anomalies—the excess of skin cancer, minor birth defects, reports of earlier symptoms of liver trouble and weak pulse in the lower legs—among the Ranch Handlers. This was emphasized at the expense of the wonderful news that the ailments that would have been suggestive of dioxin poisoning were absent. This is typical of the way the media have been treating Agent Orange for years. It is little wonder that one of the differences noted between the Ranch Handlers and the control group is that the former tended to perceive of themselves as being in poor health more often than did members of the control group. The negative attitude of the media seems to have taken its toll psychologically on this group.

CBS SWEETENER STORY TURNS SOUR

It isn't often that a story runs for three successive nights on the CBS Evening News unless it relates to some ongoing major news event. But on January 16, 17 and 18, Dan Rather's audience was treated to an expose of the dangers of a new artificial sweetener, aspartame, that has become an ingredient in 70 percent of the diet soft drinks sold in the United States.

Aspartame was discovered by a research scientist at G. D. Searle & Co. in 1965. It was 180 times as sweet as sugar, and unlike saccharin it virtually duplicated the taste of sugar. Seemingly endless testing was required to get it approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use as a sugar substitute. Over 100 studies were made, and Searle invested millions of dollars in its effort to bring aspartame to the market. It was not approved for use in liquid foods until July 1983, but that opened up a huge potential market for aspartame, which Searle sells under its trademarked brand name, NutraSweet. Searle's investment was at long last going to pay off.

But there were a few people who for reasons best known to themselves were unhappy about this. One of them was a Dr. Woodrow Monte, director of the Food Science Laboratory at Arizona State University. Dr. Monte had appeared on a few CBS programs, and it is probable that

he used his CBS connections to interest them in helping to publicize his efforts to turn the sweet outlook for Searle sour. In November 1983, CBS News went to work on an expose of the dangers of aspartame that would feature Dr. Monte. At the same time, Dr. Monte was trying to get the State of Arizona to ban the use of aspartame in food and drink sold in Arizona.

Dr. Monte was so confident that the CBS expose would create fear about aspartame that he and his lawyer placed a bet that Searle's stock would drop in price when the program was aired. They bought put options on Searle stock, meaning that they bought an option to sell Searle stock at a predetermined price during a specified period. If the market value of Searle stock fell below the price at which they had the option to sell, the value of their option would approximately equal the difference between the market value of the stock and the sale price stipulated in their option contract.

It seems that Dr. Monte and his lawyer were not alone in thinking that Searle stock was going to drop sharply in value. There was a flurry of activity in Searle put options on November 22. The speculators were betting that the stock, which was selling at around \$54 a share was going to drop below \$45 a share. It has been

reported that the Securities and Exchange Commission is looking into this, and Gene Mater, a CBS News vice president, has announced that the SEC plans to subpoena some CBS News employees. That suggests that the activity in Searle put options may have involved some CBS News personnel as well as Dr. Monte. Mr. Mater seems to think this is a possibility, since he has said that such speculation by CBS News personnel would be a violation of CBS rules.

The CBS Attack on Aspartame

Dr. Monte was the first witness CBS called against aspartame on the CBS Evening News on January 16. He started off by saying: "I don't think you could design a food product if you tried that could have as many dangers as this so called 'food product.'" Monte's main criticism was that aspartame in soft drinks that are stored for long periods at high temperatures will degrade, releasing a tiny amount of methyl alcohol. Holding up a small bottle of methyl alcohol, Monte said, "This is enough to kill a human being." He also noted that methyl alcohol is converted into formaldehyde in the body, and he said that formaldehyde is carcinogenic.

There are several things wrong with this argument. The amount of methyl alcohol contained in the aspartame found in a typical diet soft drink is less than the amount found in many fruit juices and other foods. Dr. Monte recognizes this, but he argues that there are other natural ingredients in fruit juice that protect you from methyl alcohol's effects. He says these are not present in soft drinks. Dr. Thomas H. Jukes, professor of medical physics at the University of California and AIM's adviser on matters of this kind, says this argument lacks any scientific foundation. As for the danger of the methyl alcohol converting into formaldehyde and giving us cancer, the FDA points out that formaldehyde has been shown to be carcinogenic in laboratory animals when inhaled, but not when ingested orally.

Searle spokesmen say that to get as much methyl alcohol from an aspartame-sweetened soft drink as was in the vial Dr. Monte showed on the air one would have to drink 1,100 sodas without going to the bathroom.

CBS also presented as a witness against aspartame Prof. Richard Wurtman, a brain researcher at MIT. Dr. Wurtman said that he himself used aspartame, but he was worried that people might consume more of it than the FDA had projected, and he thought that this could lead to trouble. The FDA has replied that human beings were tested by giving them six times as much aspartame as the probable upper limit of normal consumption. This did not produce any toxic effects.

Dr. Wurtman and another brain researcher, Dr. William Pardridge of UCLA, both expressed concern about phenylalanine, one of the two amino acids making up aspartame. A Searle scientist countered this on the program with the reminder that there is much more of this amino acid in foods we all eat every day than we would get from consuming small amounts of aspartame. CBS correspondent Ned Potter observed that there are normally 20 other amino acids in the body, and Dr. Wurtman said: "When you eat NutraSweet (aspartame) those other limiting amino acids aren't there and

so phenylalanine goes 'zip' right into the brain." Dr. Jukes tells us that is also unfounded.

Dr. Wurtman was reported by CBS to have gotten a "thousand letters . . . people complaining of dizziness, insomnia; even two cases of brain seizures." The implication is that those letters are all from people who have been affected adversely by consuming aspartame. The FDA notes that Dr. Wurtman has referred to it only a handful of complaints for review. It says that such complaints are common when new products are introduced on the market. CBS presented a few cases of individuals who felt that consuming products sweetened with aspartame had affected them adversely. These ranged from an account of a four-year old who allegedly had fits of violence after imbibing drinks sweetened with aspartame to a small-town doctor who thought that drinking beverages sweetened with aspartame had caused him to "look wasted" and had caused his speech to become slurred. There probably isn't a food item in the world that would be approved for consumption if it could be condemned on the basis of testimony from three people who found that it disagreed with them. Searle says that it has received only 160 complaints since NutraSweet went on the market, and it says they have been investigated and found groundless.

The Consequences of the Attack

The Searle stock closed at a price of 42½ on January 16, and CBS News began its attack that night. The next day the stock closed at 38½, suggesting that the CBS program had the negative impact that Dr. Monte had expected. However, the next day the stock recovered to close at 44½, and it remained in the 43 to 45 range for the next three weeks. The CBS assault apparently did not do the stock any permanent damage. Whether or not it put any money in the pockets of CBS News employees or their friends and relatives remains to be seen.

It would be a scandal if CBS personnel were found to be airing material designed to aid their speculation in the market disguised as news. We have grown used to journalists airing material designed to aid political causes and candidates. That may be even more damaging than rigging the news for private gain. The Federal Communications Commission won't do anything about the former; it is too busy trying to abrogate the fairness doctrine. We can be grateful that the SEC is willing to investigate the latter.

What You Can Do

Write to the companies that advertised on the CBS Evening News on January 16-18 to point out how the program they helped pay for made an unjustified attack on G. D. Searle & Co. The list of advertisers is in the Notes from the Editor's Cuff.

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